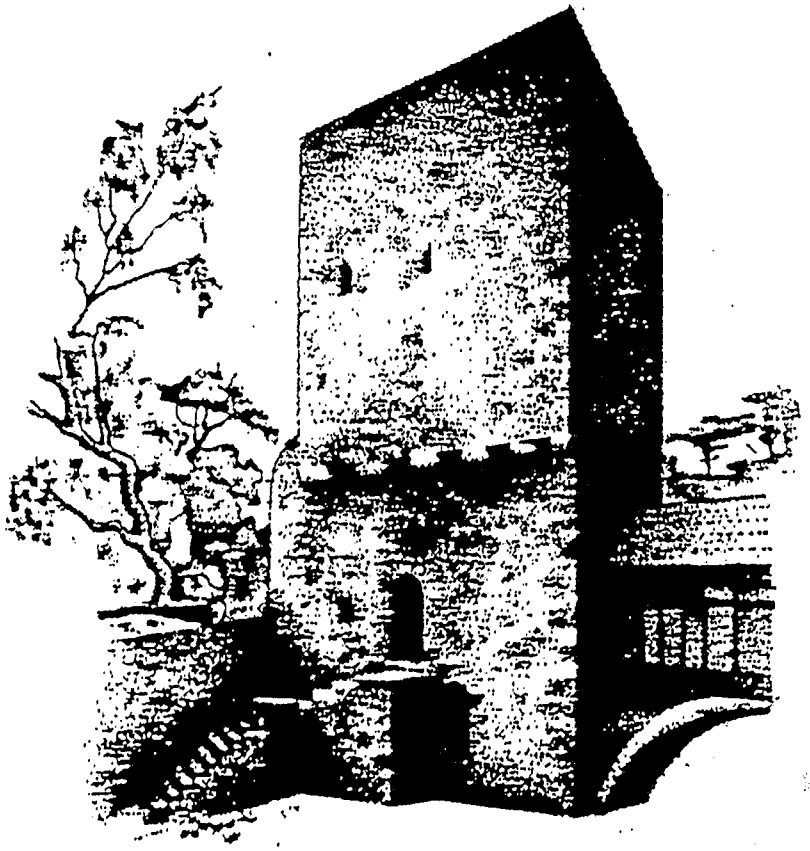
MUGDOCK CASTLE

The estate, the people and the buildings.



The Estate and the People

The Grahams

The estate of Mugdock was owned for 700 years by the descendents of Sir David Graham of Dundaff who died shortly after 1244. He was granted a charter to the lands of Strathblane and Mugdock by Maldwin, Earl of Lennox, sometime during the reign of Alexander the Second.

Around 1280 Malcolm, Earl of Lennox (grandson of Maldwin and Earl from 1270-1292) gave a Charter of Confirmation to Sir Patrick Graham, grandson of Sir David Graham of Dundaff. At the same time he gave Sir Patrick another Charter giving him the right to hold a court, with jurisdiction in these and other lands in the neighbourhood, and have a prison.

In 1458 King James the Second gave Patrick, first Lord Graham, a Charter erecting the Stirlingshire lands of Mugdock into a Barony. This meant that Lord Graham and his successors held the lands of Mugdock direct from the crown, rather than from an intermediate superior such as the Earl of Lennox, and had the right to hold a Barony court until heritable jurisdictions were abolished after the 1745 rising. The lands involved consisted of Mugdock itself, various lands in Strathblane including Leddriegreen, Edenkiln, Drumbrock and Craigallian as well as Carbeth, Auchengillan and Killearn. Various other lands were added to the Barony of Mugdock in 1458 and later. Many of the tenancies were converted to feus from 1626 onwards which in due course led to separate estates being formed.

The composition of the Barony in 1647 is outlined by J Guthrie Smith in "The Parish of Strathblane" quoting the Act of Parliament transferring the Barony to the Marquis of Argyll. It included lands spread over a wide area including the south-west part of the Parish of Strathblane, much of present day Milngavie, Kessington and Boclair in Bearsden, Summerston in Glasgow, a number of pieces of land round Balmore and Killearn.

The Grahams entered the peerage in 1445 when Patrick Graham was made a Lord of Parliament with the title Lord Graham.

They moved up one rank when William, third Lord Graham, was created Earl of Montrose in 1505 and another when James, fifth Earl of Montrose and seventh Lord Graham, was created Marquis of Montrose in 1644 by King Charles the First.

The first Marquis was one of Charles the First's most successful generals, winning seven battles. However, in 1647,

shortly after he went into exile, following Charles the First's surrender, the Barony of Mugdock was forfeited and granted to the Marquis of Argyll who passed it to his son, retaining the life rent for himself. James, second Marquis of Montrose, redeemed the estate from the Argyll family in 1655.

Finally James, fourth Marquis and eighth Earl of Montrose and tenth Lord Graham, was made Duke of Montrose in 1707.

Shortly before this, in 1682, the Grahams purchased Buchanan Castle and made that their seat and principal residence.

The Tenants

Mugdock Castle was then let, first to a family of Grahams who died out, then to various people of whom the two best known were Bailie Archibald McLellan and J Guthrie Smith.

Archibald McLellan was a bailie of Glasgow and was the founder of the McLellan Galleries. He was the son of the Archibald McLellan who was one of the best known Deacon Conveners of the Trades of Glasgow.

John Guthrie Smith was a well known antiquarian and author of "The Parish of Strathblane" and other books. He also provided MacGibbon and Ross (see bibliography) with much of their information about Mugdock. He was granted a long lease of the castle in 1874 and from 1891-93 was Lord Dean of Guild of Glasgow.

Subsequent Owners

The Grahams finally ended their ownership of Mugdock when the sixth Duke of Montrose sold the castle and estate to Hugh Fraser, later Lord Fraser of Allander, in 1945. His son, Sir Hugh Fraser Bart., gifted these to the former Central Region in 1981 for use as a country park along with an endowment.

The estate and castle are now owned by Stirling Council and form part of the Mugdock Country Park which is run jointly by Stirling and East Dunbartonshire Councils.

The Buildings

The Site

Mugdock Castle is situated in a good defensive position on a promontory at the edge of Mugdock Loch. The loch provided even more protection in the Middle Ages as it was much higher then and came round three sides of the promontory. It was lowered to its present level when a wide passage was cut through a strip of volcanic rock to allow more water to flow out of the loch. The castle is also strategically sited on the high ground between the Allander valley and the Blane valley and in the gap between the Kilpatrick Hills and the Campsie Hills. The castle's main purpose, however, would have been to act as the "caput" or administrative centre of the estate of Mugdock.

The Castle's Date

It is not known when the castle was started but there was certainly a castle at Mugdock by 1372 as, according to Guthrie Smith, a deed was signed "apud manerium de Mugdock" on 24th August 1372. It recorded an agreement between Sir Patrick Graham and Angus Hawinroyss relating to the lands of Boclair.

The Fourteenth Century Building

The original building could have been built of timber. However the first building of which remains survive was probably built in the fourteenth century.

All that remains of the fourteenth century castle is the ground floor of the north-west tower, the south-west tower, the west curtain (or enceinte) wall between them and a portion of the south curtain wall. In the north-west tower the remains of a fireplace, and a short section of a substantial wall running from the tower in an easterly direction, can be seen. On the inside of the west curtain wall the outline of the roof of a building (possibly the Hall), which was once set against it is still visible. Within this outline are two arrow slits and a window above and between them. There was a gateway 8ft 4½ inches wide in the south west curtain wall adjacent to the south west tower. The gateway must have had a portcullis as the groove for it is still visible in the section that remains. According to MacGibbon and Ross the rebates for the outer and inner folding wooden doors were still visible in 1889, however there is no trace of these now. The gateway has been narrowed at some time, probably when the fifteenth century extension to the curtain wall was added with its own gateway. In 1967 the BBC altered the gateway when filming "The Borderers".

There is no firm evidence of what the structure of the east side of the fourteenth century building was like. The most commonly accepted theory is that the building was a four sided walled enclosure with towers in each corner. However, there was a house of some sort, referred to by Spalding as the

"staitly house of Mugdock", which was damaged when the castle was sacked during the Civil War in the time of King Charles the First. There is no evidence of what this house was like or when it was built but the possibility that it was part of the fourteenth century building must be kept in mind.

The South West Tower

The south-west tower, which is the most complete part of the fourteenth century building, measures about 59 feet from the ground to the top of the parapet wall and is four stories high.

The ground floor is basically a vault entered by a door in the north wall and has no internal access to the floors above. It has a guarde-robe in the thickness of the outer wall, up a few steps. The guarde-robe has no visible outlet.

The first floor contained the main entrance to the tower which was originally reached from the courtyard by a wooden ladder which could be removed in the event of an attack. The entrance is now reached by a flight of stone steps.

The main room on this floor is spanned by a vault supported on broad splayed ribs which MacGibbon and Ross described as being similar in construction to those at Yester Castle in East Lothian. The room contains a large fireplace in the north wall. Also in the north wall of this room is a blocked up opening which led to the passage to the Victorian mansion referred to later. There is also a very small room just off the stairs which could have been an armoury or a guard room.

From the first floor a wheel stair or corkscrew staircase within the thickness of the wall gives access to the second floor. The staircase turned clockwise in order to give the advantage to a right handed swordsman standing at the top and defending the stair against someone coming up.

Part of the way up the stair is the remains of a door, which can be seen more clearly from the outside. It almost certainly gave access to a walkway which led to the chamber from which the portcullis was controlled. This walkway was probably made of wood.

From the top of the wheel stair a straight stone stair set against the east wall gives access to the third floor. From the "landing" between the two stairs a doorway leads to a chamber occupying the whole of the second floor. This floor is made of stone. This arrangement means that guards could reach the top of the tower without going into this chamber thus allowing the occupants privacy. The chamber has a fireplace smaller than the one in the first floor and a small inset in one of the walls where valuables could be kept.

The third floor consists of a single room with a stone stair running up the east wall. The ceiling is about 15 feet high at present but there are four bricks, two on the north wall and two on the south wall, inserted into holes in the wall

about 10 feet up from floor level and about two feet above the level of the top of the stone stair. It is possible that these mark the places where the supports for an old ceiling were.

From the top of the stone stair a wooden stair runs up the north wall and leads to a loft from which there is access to the battlements. If the ceiling of the third floor was at the level of the top of the stair, or the bricks, rather than the present level, the loft would have been a fourth floor room.

The battlements consist of a high parapet wall without embrasures. Within the parapet but leaving space to walk round is the roof structure. The roof was replaced in the late 19th century but according to MacGibbon and Ross was in exactly the same form as the roof it replaced. The present roof was put on in 1995 and once again is as near the style of the one it replaced as shown in drawings etc. as possible.

From the walkway within the parapet good views could have been obtained by the sentries eastward to the Kilpatrick Hills, westward to the Campsies and southward over the Allander valley.

The present roof, floors and windows have been put in with money raised by the Mugdock Trust from various generous donors, including Historic Scotland and the Clan Graham Society of America.

The Outer Bailey

What was possibly an outer courtyard or bailey was added later, probably in the fifteenth century. A wall was built out from the south-west tower in a westerly direction across the promontory. There is an outer gateway in this wall close to the south-west tower, and there are also two gun slits.

There is another wall, going part of the way along the west edge of the plateau. The first part of this wall is probably quite old and merges with a narrower Victorian wall, possibly on the line of the older wall. There are faint traces of the old wall continuing round to the chapel.

There is also a doorway, described by MacGibbon and Ross as "comparatively modern", in the original curtain wall close to the south-west tower which allows access from the original courtyard to the extension.

The Domestic Range

In the early seventeenth century a stone building was erected against the fifteenth century wall to the west of the gateway. This building was possibly domestic offices of some kind and is now known as the domestic range. This was a fairly substantial divided two-storey building with separate doorways leading into the two halves. The outline of an outside staircase leading up to the second floor of the western half of the building can still be seen. It is believed there was

once a similar stair leading to the second floor of the eastern half of the building. It was damaged by fire in 1965.

The Sack of the Castle

According to MacGibbon and Ross, the castle was sacked twice during the reign of Charles the First. The first time by Lord Sinclair in 1641 and the second time by the Buchanans in 1644. On the latter occasion "the part of the house fronting the loch and one of the towers" (a northern one) was damaged and allowed to fall into ruins.

The Seventeenth Century House

A house was built out of the ruins in 1655/7 after the second Marquis of Montrose redeemed the Barony of Mugdock. According to MacGibbon & Ross this incorporated a vaulted cellar belonging to the old building. According to Guthrie Smith it was linked to one of the towers. This house stood until about 1875 when it was demolished to make way for Guthrie Smith's house. The only known drawing of it is a sketch by Edward Arthur Walton dated 1872. This shows a fairly plain two storey house with crow-step gables. It was described as "a poor dwelling for a Marquis".

The Victorian Mansion

The house built by J Guthrie Smith, is generally referred to as the Victorian mansion. It was built in the courtyard in baronial style and was linked to the room on the first floor of the south west tower, by a covered passage carried on a stone archway the remains of which can still be seen. It was inhabited until 1948.

The Victorian mansion suffered from vandalism and fire before it was demolished in 1967. All that remains of it is the outer wall, to a height of 6 - 10 feet. The interior was filled with rubble by the BBC when they filmed "The Borderers".

The Victorian Outbuildings

To the west of the north west tower lie the remains of the Victorian outbuildings erected by Guthrie Smith.

The Chapel and the Latrine Tower

About 107 yards north of the south west tower is the remains of another building situated on the edge of a steep bank sloping down to the old level of the loch. It is built of stone and measures 40 feet by 17½ feet. MacGibbon and Ross state that according to local tradition it was a chapel.

There is a tower projecting to the north of the chapel with two arrow slits facing out over the loch. The base of the tower contains three large blocked flues suggesting it was a latrine.

The Wall

MacGibbon and Ross also record that the foundations of a wall stretching southwards from the east end of the chapel for about 200 feet in the general direction of the castle was visible at that time but it is not visible now.

The Borderers

The BBC used the castle as Slitrig Castle when they filmed the series "The Borderers" in the late 1960's. They removed parts of the south west tower and some of the outbuildings of the plateau as well as filling the interior of the Victorian mansion with rubble and making alterations to the original portcullis gateway.

The Echo

The account of Mugdock Castle given in the chapter on the Parish of Strathblane in the (first) Statistical Account of Scotland published in 1795 refers to an echo from the castle. If someone standing 300 yards from the south west tower spoke a word or phrase of six syllables, even quietly, it would echo back in the tone and accent used. The echo can still be heard but not very clearly, perhaps due to the surrounding trees. The echo stone, an outcrop of rock, marks the point to stand.

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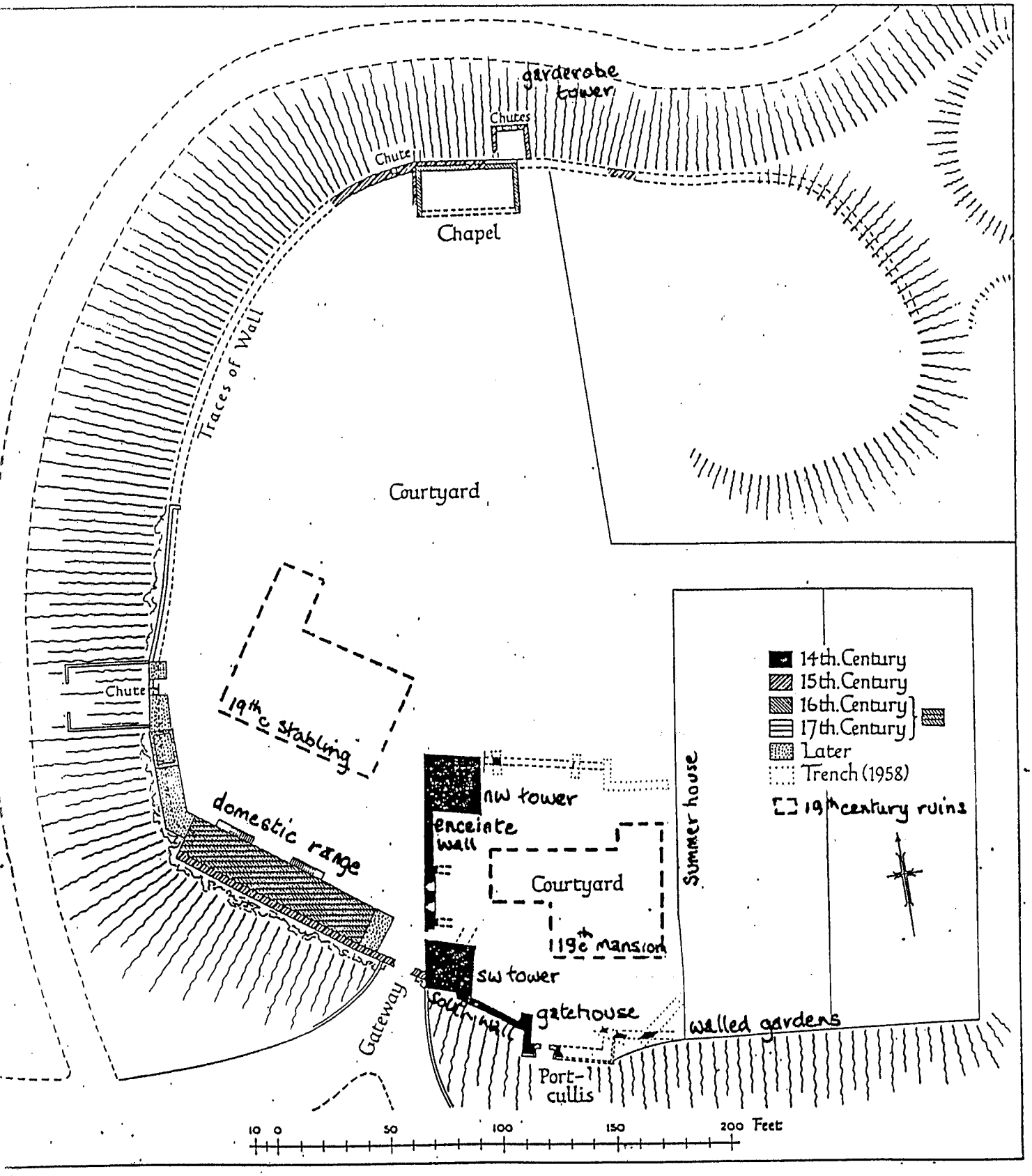

Mugdock Castle general plan